

Chiropractic Antecedents of Holistic Health

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Abstract — The word holistic is a relatively recent addition to our vocabulary and was not in common use during D.D. Palmer's life. However, the premise of this article is that D.D. Palmer was an early proponent of holistic health care, even though he did not use that word. The chiropractic profession has attracted many strong willed individuals who are fond of arguing about what is 'true' chiropractic. A secondary aim of this article is to suggest that our profession would be better served by returning to the words of the founder of our profession, rather than quoting his son, B.J. Palmer.

Key Words: Holistic, holism, chiropractic, health, wellness

Introduction

D.D. Palmer died in 1913, just three years after the publication of his one and only book, *The Chiropractor's Adjuster*. His son, B.J. Palmer had a long and distinguished career until his death in 1961. Why does the chiropractic profession focus more on the teachings of the son, rather than the father? Part of the explanation centers on the personality of B.J.

B.J. was a dynamic individual and a successful businessman in several fields. He said, "*Early to bed, early to rise; Work like hell - and advertise.*"¹ During his long career, B.J. published many thousands of pages of text in over 25 books. He attached a circular roll of paper to his typewriter, so he would not have to interrupt his train of thought to feed in the next sheet of paper. He was a strong willed person who kept the profession alive during a time when DC's were being put in jail for practicing medicine without a license. It is entirely possible that if there had not been a B.J. Palmer nurturing chiropractic in its infancy, we would not have a chiropractic profession today. However, does this mean we should accord his words more weight than the discoverer of chiropractic?

While the father appears to have been more grounded in science, the son was more competent in business. When D.D. moved to Portland, Oregon in 1902, he left behind \$8,000 in

debt. Even though he was just twenty years old, B.J. assumed control of the school and managed to repay his father's debts and stabilize the school finances. When D.D. returned to Davenport in 1904, he was probably surprised that the Palmer School was flourishing under B.J.'s guidance. Was D.D. jealous of his son's success? Perhaps. We can only evaluate the words in D.D.'s book. These words show a genuine concern that his teachings were being distorted by others. While he pointed out the errors of Willard Carver and others, his harshest criticism was leveled at his son, B.J. Palmer.

B.J. Palmer's book, *The Science of Chiropractic*, was published in 1906, four years prior to D.D.'s book. This book was a compilation of both his own and his father's writing (from D.D.'s subscription newsletter, *The Adjuster*). Unfortunately, B.J. took his father's words, edited them, and then presented them as his own. This prompted D.D. in 1910 to write, "*No one Chiropractor has done as much to vitiate, deprave and pervert the principles and philosophy of the science and art originated, developed and founded by his father. . . . There are 40 articles, written by my own hand and original with me, which have been garbled, mutilated and copyrighted by B.J. Palmer and sold as his own production.*"²

The sub-title to D.D.'s book, *The Chiropractor's Adjuster*, is *Text-Book of the Science, Art and Philosophy of Chiropractic for Students and Practitioners*. By intention D.D. placed science in the first rank and philosophy last. When

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reading D.D.'s book, one cannot help but be impressed with the clarity and precision of his writing. D.D. did not hesitate pointing out the scientific lapses of his son. D.D. quotes B.J. as having said, *"When I saw there was no use for a Sympathetic Nervous System, I threw it out, and then just had to put something better in its place, so I discovered Direct Mental Impulse."*³

In response D.D. wrote, *"It is strange that all anatomists find these nerves if they do not exist. It is more strange that a youth of 26 years, who has had but little or no experience in dissecting should array himself against every anatomist."*⁴

*"I am truly ashamed to have such ignorance passed off for Chiropractic. Therefore I will continue to adjust all dislocations found in Chiropractic literature. Such clothing does not belong to Chiropractic, does not fit the boy Chiro. It makes a laughing stock both of him and those who accept such teachings."*⁵

In a Chiropractic leaflet B.J. Palmer wrote, *"Chiropractic was discovered by Dr. D.D. Palmer in September, 1895, and developed into a science and philosophy by his son."* In response, D.D. wrote, *"If a lack of knowledge of laws, anatomy, reason, philosophy, science and the phenomena of Chiropractic constitute development then truly the above is correct."*⁶

*"The word Innate and its use, as one of the principles added to Chiropractic literature, was originated by me, as were all the principles of Chiropractic. The only principle added by B.J. Palmer was that of greed and graft, aspiring to be the discoverer, developer, founder and the fountain head of a science brought forth by his father while he was a lad in his teens."*⁷

D.D. Palmer was open to future developments

*"As a student of the healing art in all its various phases, I am naturally deeply interested in every method that will promise a definite cure of any complaint. I know if a patient were under my care and I should find he was unable to secure improvement, that if he should go elsewhere and secure a definite and permanent cure, that I would be intensely interested in the methods that were used in bringing about the cure. This, it seems to me should be the policy of any intelligent, conscientious man, be he physician or student, but this is not the view of many members of the medical profession."*⁸

*"As a means of relieving suffering and disease, Allopathy, Homeopathy, Osteopathy and now Chiropractic, have each, in turn, improved upon its predecessor. The latter, of all the others, is entitled to the seat of honor and distinction. But, as soon as the human mind is capable of absorbing a still more refined and advanced method and human aspiration demands it, it will be forthcoming and I hope to be the medium thru which it will be delivered to the denizens of the earth."*⁹

*"There are two classes of Chiropractors, those who desire to know all they can of physiology, pathology, neurology and anatomy, and those who have an aversion for intelligence, do not want to take effect into consideration, depending only upon an examination of the spinous processes."*¹⁰

"The capacity of the human mind to absorb and retain knowledge varies greatly. . . . Some are mentally limited in

*their ability to accumulate an education, while others seem unlimited. As soon as any person thinks he knows it all, he ceases to learn, or at least, until he has fully digested what has been acquired; while there are others who realize that they know but little in comparison to what there is to be known."*¹¹

*"Great truths are not born suddenly; they come by degrees; they are the result of consecutive investigation rather than discursive reasoning."*¹²

D.D. Palmer's teachings support 'Holistic' health care

D.D. Palmer said, *"The determining causes of disease are traumatism, poison and auto-suggestion."*¹³ Updating these categories to more contemporary terminology we have the structural, chemical, and mental causes shown on the Applied Kinesiology logo:



Trauma (structural causes)

- Accidents

*"Innumerable accidents make us liable to displace some portion of the bony framework, more especially the segments of the vertebral column."*¹⁴

- Poor posture & repetitive strain

*"Distortions of the softened bones are caused by atmospheric pressure, the force of gravity, habitual posture, muscular action or injuries."*¹⁵

- Hereditary anomalies

*"It is the Chiropractor's business to be acquainted with the normal so that he may recognize irregularities; it is with the latter he has to deal. . . . No inconsiderate student can fail to be appreciative and interested when he discovers so many variations revealed by the study of anomalies."*¹⁶

- Physical inactivity

*"Physiological atrophy depends upon normal inactivity, nonuse. Tissues, when exercised, enlarge, become hypertrophied; when not in use, their substance is decreased."*¹⁷

Poisons (chemical causes)

- Poor diet & devitalized food

*"Food is nutritive material taken into the body of an organism for the purpose of growth, repair and the maintenance of the vital processes. Poison is any substance which when introduced into the animal organism, destroys life, impairs functions and produces a morbid condition of tissue. In health, functions, tissue and temperature must be normal. Any deviation of the latter makes a change in the action of organs and the substance of tissue. The ingesta may become food or poison."*¹⁸

*"Disease is either too much energy or not enough, an excess of nutrition or a lack of it."*¹⁹

- Air pollution (including tobacco)

"The smoking of cigarettes poisons the nervous system. This poison affects sensory nerves which in turn contract

motor nerves, drawing bones to which they are attached, out of alignment."²⁰

- Impure water

"There are many diseases which seem not to be the direct result of accidents or poisons, altho violence has occurred. Instead of a traumatic, it may have produced a toxic lesion. I refer to those deleterious substances in the air we breathe, in the food we eat, in the water we drink, the poison on the saloon counter, or that sucked from the tobacco pipe or administered by an M.D. These, just as surely, produce vertebral lesions as those which are traumatic."²¹

- Bacterial, viral, & fungal infections

"Is there a prospect of eliminating disease? Not while our surroundings are unsanitary; not while we are being inoculated with the poison of infectious diseases, vaccine lymph taken from the pustles of an animal; not while we are subject to traumatic accidents which displace some portion of the osseous framework."²²

"Chiropractors look upon bacteria as scavengers who live upon dead and decaying matter. Their existence is as much a natural result as is the mold found in decaying cheese. We understand that necrosed mucous membranes are the result of excessive heat, local inflammation; that deleterious substances act upon sensory nerves, causing them to be unduly excited, inflamed."²³

- Prescription and over the counter medications

"The healing art of the future will not have anything in common with the science of drugging. It will abandon drugs entirely and we will have instead the use of water, diet and exercise in such a manner as to bring about the results that are desired, and they will be brought more speedily and far more safely than through the use of medicine."²⁴

- Allergy to foods or airborne inhalants

"In proportion as the ingesta induces irritation, it becomes a poison and ceases to be food. That which is food to one may be poison to another. When that which is food for one person impairs the functions of another, it becomes a poison to that other. "Improper food" is not a food, it is a poison."²⁵

- Chronic constipation

"For example, in a normal condition the bowel actions are under the control of Innate, but because of luxated vertebrae the nerves of bowel innervation are inactive, being pressed upon in the intervertebral foramina, consequently there is a lack of action, usually named constipation."²⁶

"The poison, acting on certain nerves, irritates their structure. They in turn contract muscles which draw vertebrae out of alignment, thereby impinging nerves which go to and affect certain portions of the body."²⁷

Autosuggestion (mental causes)

- In present day terminology, this category includes many

factors such as the general adaptation to stress syndrome described by Hans Selye, the placebo effect, and psychoneuroimmunology.

"While it is a fact, that thots are things, are entities, that we influence each other and ourselves for good or bad by our thinking, it is also a fact that it is a mental condition, in and of ourselves. It is one of the three methods I recognize of creating normal and abnormal nerve and muscle tension."²⁸

"Love or hate, joy or grief, fear or boldness, affect the secretions of glands and follicles."²⁹

"Cheerfulness makes love of life, and love of life is half of health. On the contrary, sadness and discouragement hasten old age."³⁰

"When studying the etiology of disease, we should remember, that underlying the manifestations of health and disease, are: the ceaseless, complex vital transformations which supply energy in varying amounts, which maintain life as expressed in health and disease. Impingements, poisons and intense thinking, auto-suggestion, unrelieved change of thot, insufficient rest and sleep, increase or decrease the momentum of impulses."³¹

Conclusion

Chiropractors should be proud of the founder of our profession. He was clearly a man of high intellect with a profound grasp of anatomy and physiology. This is all the more remarkable, considering that he had virtually no formal education. His wisdom was the result of his own diligent effort. By his own words, he held a diploma "from no earthly school but from High Heaven."³²

D.D. Palmer envisioned a new form of health care. Chiropractic is now the second largest health care profession, and the leading profession that focuses on the restoration of health through prevention of disease. While the word 'holistic' was not in common use in his time, it is clear that the framework D.D. Palmer created for us encompasses 'holistic' health care.

"The Chiropractor looks upon the body as more than a machine; a union of consciousness and unconsciousness; Innate's ability to transfer impulses to all parts of the body-the coordination of sensation and volition: a personified immaterial spirit and body linked together by the soul-a life directed by intelligence uniting the immaterial with the material."³³

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